

TOWN OF HARPSWELL
COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting of November 19, 2008
Approved Minutes

Committee Members Present: Alan M. Shaver
 C.V. Noyes
 David I. Chipman

Town Staff Present: James Henderson, Selectman
 Melissa Moretti, Recording Secretary

Guest: Jay Somers, Sr. Manager of Government & Community
 Relations, Comcast Cable

The meeting opened at 3:00 PM at the Harpswell Town Office, 263 Mountain Road, Harpswell, Maine.

The Town of Harpswell has been in the process of negotiating a renewal of its Franchise Agreement with Comcast. Mr. Somers was present in order to continue negotiations.

The recording secretary provided a copy of a map that had Comcast had given to the Harpswell Town Administrator, Kristi Eiane, who was away on vacation. The map showed areas of Harpswell that were not served by Comcast, according to their information.

Handouts distributed to the committee members:

1. Letter from Mr. Somers to Kristi Eiane dated October 9, 2008 regarding "Cable Franchise Renewal Process & Proposed Extension".
2. Letter from Mr. Somers to the Harpswell Board of Selectmen dated October 24, 2008 regarding "Price Adjustments".
3. Letter from Mr. Somers to the Harpswell Board of Selectmen dated November 18, 2008 regarding "Price Adjustment – Correction".
4. Fax from Mr. Somers to Harpswell Board of Selectmen dated November 18, 2008 regarding the status of Gannett's negotiations with Comcast to keep WCSH (Channel 6) on their service network.
5. Chart of responses from Harpswell community members regarding their level of satisfaction with Comcast services.

Mr. Somers explained to the committee the reason for his memo regarding Gannett's issue with Channel 6.

Mr. Somers reviewed the issues discussed at the last meeting, and addressed each one.

1. Seasonal Disconnect – There is a minimum of three months and a maximum of 6 months (October 1st - April 30th) where Comcast would offer seasonal disconnection of service to residential customers. The fee for "video only" disconnect would be \$5.95/mo., the fee for "internet only" disconnect would be \$3.95/mo., and to disconnect both services the fee would be \$9.90/mo.

Alternatively, the customer could turn in their converter box and, upon their return, another converter box would be issued by Comcast with a reconnect fee of \$29.99.

It was suggested that a letter be generated for distribution to the community explaining the above described details.

2. Map – Mr. Somers stated that technical staff in the Brunswick office of Comcast created the map that had been sent to Kristi Eiane, the Town Administrator, and which was made available to the committee at the meeting. The map was intended to show areas where there was no cable service in the Harpswell area. Mr. Somers elaborated that these areas either 1) did not meet the minimum density requirements of 18 homes/mile, or 2) an individual subscriber did not want to pay to have a cable run.
3. Harpswell Community Television – Mr. Chipman reiterated that they would be looking for wider bandwidth in order to provide streaming video. Mr. Somers requested a written summary from Mr. Chipman detailing the requested equipment/requirements and how they would be utilized, and then Mr. Somers could provide a quote.

Mr. Chipman said he would check with the area schools to ensure they have one free internet connection and one free drop, as provided for by the current Franchise Agreement. He would also confirm that the internet service provided by Comcast included free internet service to Harpswell area libraries.

4. Length of Agreement – The Committee reiterated that, if the Agreement was renewed for more than five years, the Town would want technology protection. The language of the current Franchise Agreement stated that Harpswell should have access to whatever services are offered to other Maine towns. Comcast's "Triple Play" would be considered an improvement in technology, and should be offered. The language of the new Franchise Agreement should include technology protection. This issue is considered a high priority for the Town.

The amortization of the franchise fee was discussed, plus additional costs for equipment for Harpswell Community Television. It was stated that the fire departments had free internet service; Mr. Somers indicated that may had been negotiated with Suscom, the previous cable service provider, and would not be included in the new agreement. The Committee decided that financials would be necessary in order to proceed.

There was further discussion regarding the issue of Gannett and WCSH.

The Committee decided:

- 1) to check the service area map provided by Comcast with a housing density map that could be provided by the Town,
- 2) the Committee should compile numbers and inform Mr. Somers, and
- 3) that Mr. Chipman would contact the Harpswell schools.

Mr. Somers said he would contact Ms. Eiane to set up another meeting after he obtained the requested information from Mr. Chipman.

Mr. Somers left the meeting at 4:00 PM.

There was further discussion among the Committee regarding the issue of expected support from the Selectmen.

There was also discussion regarding seeking out another service provider if the Town did not renew the Franchise Agreement with Comcast. It was stated that the current Agreement had been renewed for three more months (from October 1, 2008). Upon termination of the Agreement, Comcast would either remove the equipment or abandon it, whereupon it would

revert to the ownership of the Town. It was also stated that the cost of initiating service with a new cable service provider would be diminished because there had already been cable service provided. It was stated that the Town's Agreement with Comcast is non-exclusive.

There was discussion of the possibility of wireless cable services in the future.

The Minutes of September 29, 2008 and October 1, 2008 were approved.

Discussion continued, and it was explained that capital grants and franchise fees pay for cable television and any technological advances, with the costs spread out over a five or ten year period.

There was discussion on whether or not the Town could use the server of the local Harpswell TV station.

Mr. Henderson said he could talk to the Town Planner regarding creation of a map/overlay which showed the number of homes/mile, perhaps using GIS and/or 911 sources.

There was further discussion of the advantages of the Town having a five year Agreement with Comcast.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Moretti
Recording Secretary